

# Student Visa FAQs

## 29 Frequently Asked Questions

To answer frequently asked questions that many Sri Lankan students have about student visas to the United States, the **U.S. Embassy** has compiled this information sheet. For further information about student visas, please refer to the U.S. Embassy's website <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov> and the website of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, <http://travel.state.gov>.



# **1 ■ How do I apply for a student visa?**

To apply for a student visa, you must have an I -20 from the university/ college you plan to attend and complete forms DS-156, DS-158 (and DS-157 if you are male between the ages 16-45 years). Next, you need to follow the directions on our website, <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/visas/non-immigrant-visas/visa-application-process.html>, to pay fees and schedule an appointment. Student visa applicants must also pay a USD \$200 SEVIS fee to the school before interviewing at the Embassy.

# **2 ■ What documents are required and not required? (Is a police report required? Is property evaluation essential?)**

You should come to the interview with your original I-20 issued by the academic institution where you intend to study, all academic records (e.g. G.C.E. O/L and A/L), and any evidence of financial resources to show that you can afford your education. While there are no specific financial documents required, you should feel free to bring everything you believe will support your case. Consular officers almost always ask to see at least six months of transaction history from your bank accounts. A police certificate is not necessary for student visa applicants. All documents submitted should be genuine -- if the consular officer at any time believes you have submitted a false document, you will be refused the visa and the document(s) could be turned over to the police.

# **3 ■ Do I need to bring a bank statement or a 6-month transaction statement? Can bank statements be from any bank?**

Consular officers will almost always ask to see the last six months of bank statements from your financial sponsor. A letter from the bank will not suffice. Bank statements can be from any official financial institution (bank).

# **4 ■ Can someone in the U.S. be my sponsor?**

Yes. You may have family or close friends in the U.S. who are able and willing to support you financially while you are in school. However, this sponsorship must be genuine. Every consular officer must believe the legitimacy of your financial evidence and it is extremely important that you are honest during the interview.

# **5 ■ If I am denied a visa the first time I apply, how can I appeal?**

There is no formal appeal process. Applicants may reapply by going through the application procedure. For the benefit of the applicants, the Consular Section's policy is, to the extent possible, to appoint a different interviewing officer for subsequent applications. Before you reapply, we strongly encourage you to re-read the requirements for a student visa and spend some time reflecting on your interview and any gaps that you may not have been able to fully address.

# **6 ■ What are my chances the second time if I was denied a visa the first time? Is it better to apply with the same I-20 or a different one?**

Each applicant's case is different, but generally consular officers encourage you to wait until your circumstances

have changed or you have additional evidence that was not presented during your first interview before reapplying. The academic institution you choose to attend (and the I-20 you present) should be the one that is best suited to your academic interests and financial resources.

## **7. ■ Does it matter in what order my documents are arranged?**

For the purpose of the interview, it is easier if your academic records are presented first (in chronological order starting from the latest record), followed by your financial information. Any other supporting documents, e.g. character references or extracurricular certificates, should be last.

## **8. ■ How long is a visa interview?**

At most Embassies around the world, visa interviews last roughly 2 minutes. However, we try to give you as much consideration as possible depending upon the volume of applicants that must be interviewed. Interviews typically will range from 2 to 10 minutes in duration depending upon the case.

## **9. ■ What is the wait period for a visa appointment? What is the time line for after the appointment?**

During the high visa seasons (summer and winter), the waiting period to schedule a visa interview may be as long as one month. If you qualify for the visa at the time of your interview, your visa will likely be ready within 24 hours, however some cases may take as long as 3 months or more to process. Therefore, the Consular Section encourages you to apply as soon as possible, but no earlier than 90 days prior to the reporting date noted on your I-20.

## **10. ■ Can I bring many I-20s to my visa interview?**

Yes, you can bring all of your I-20s to the interview, but you will need to have identified, and paid the USD \$200 SEVIS fee, for the academic institution that has accepted you. You *must* bring the I-20 for the school you plan to attend.

## **11. ■ I heard that one particular visa consular officer is really strict. Will my chances decrease if I get her as my interviewer?**

No. Every consular officer gives each applicant every consideration consistent with U.S. immigration law. At the time of the interview, the officer must believe that you intend to study, that you are able to maintain full-time student status in the U.S., and that you can afford the school.

## **12. ■ If I paid my SEVIS fee on one I-20, and now I've decided to use another I-20, do I need to somehow transfer my payment? How do I do this?**

Yes, you should contact the school you intend to attend and ask them to amend your SEVIS record to reflect the change. Please refer to the following website for further information: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/>.

## **13. If I am granted a student visa for one college and decide to transfer to a second college while I am in the U.S., do I need to get my visa renewed? Is there a fee for this?**

As long as you are remaining in the U.S. to continue your studies, you do not need a new visa if you have a valid I-20 and are in good standing with your school. However, if you change degree type (e.g. from bachelors degree to masters degree) or schools, and subsequently leave the U.S. for any reason, you will need a new visa in order to reenter the United States.

## **14. Are there any colleges that the U.S. Embassy has 'blacklisted' (i.e. the Embassy will not grant visas to attend these colleges)?**

No, the Embassy accepts I-20s and visa applications for all accredited education institutions in the United States. When you apply for a college in the U.S. you should make sure that it is an accredited institution. In case of doubt, please consult the U.S.-Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission at No.7, Flower Terrace, Colombo 7.

## **15. Do some Sri Lankan students who are granted a visa have problems or get denied at the point of entry in the U.S.?**

The F-1 student visa provides you only with the authorization to ask for admission into the U.S. from the U.S. Bureau of Citizen and Immigration Services at the point of entry. Typically, however, Sri Lankan student visa holders are granted admission. Remember to carry your I-20 with your passport in your hand luggage so that you can show it to the immigration officer at the port of entry.

## **16. Do my chances of a student visa for a college increase or decrease if many Sri Lankan students are already at that college?**

No. The number of Sri Lankan students at any particular school has no bearing on your qualifications for a student visa.

## **17. Is it important to have a scholarship to get a visa?**

Scholarships can be very important if your family will have difficulty paying for your education and living expenses in the United States. Many schools provide tuition waivers for some international students while others provide financial aid packages for students with low incomes. The Embassy encourages all prospective students to plan well ahead, apply to schools early and investigate opportunities for financial aid through the schools directly. There are no fees for applying for scholarships or financial aid in the United States. That being said, however, having a scholarship is not essential to qualifying for a visa nor does having a scholarship guarantee you will qualify for a visa.

## **18. Does it make a difference if the school I apply to is a public or private school in terms of getting a student visa?**

No, the type of school has no bearing on your qualifications for a student visa.

## **19. ■ If I have relatives in influential positions, will I get a student visa if they speak to you?**

No, every applicant has to qualify based on his or her own merits.

## **20. ■ To cut costs, I'll be living with my brother and cousin when I get to the U.S. Will this count against me when applying for a student visa?**

We consider all sources of income and support when evaluating whether you can afford your educational expenses.

## **21. ■ My siblings have all settled in the U.S. Will this influence my being granted a student visa?**

As a student visa applicant, you must convince the consular officer that you have the ability, intent and means to study in the U.S. The officer also must believe that you have a residence abroad to which you intend to return after finishing your education.

## **22. ■ I'm from an underprivileged class in Sri Lanka. Will this count for or against me?**

Consular officers do not consider an applicant's caste or ethnicity during an interview.

## **23. ■ If I have disabilities or health problems, will these count against me?**

No. Again, if you can convince the officer that you have the ability, intent and means to study in the U.S., you may qualify for the visa.

## **24. ■ I've taken an educational loan from a Sri Lankan bank to pay for my education in the U.S. Will this count against me?**

Not necessarily. As long as you can show that you have the means to re-pay the loan without resorting to illegal employment in the U.S. this will not be counted against you.

## **25. ■ I'd like to go to the U.S. as a transfer student. Do my chances increase or decrease for a student visa?**

Neither. If you have a poor academic record, getting good marks at a local university can help convince the interviewing officer that you have the ability to study in the U.S. Other factors, such as the intent and means to study in the U.S. may be considered by the interviewing officer.

## **26. ■ I've completed my master's in Sri Lanka and want to get my second master's in the U.S. Will this count against me when applying for a student visa?**

No, so long as you have good reasons for seeking a second master's degree and can convince the interviewing officer that you have the ability, intent and means to study in the U.S. and will return upon completion of your studies.

## **27. ■ I haven't taken the TOEFL or the IELTS, or any of the other standardized tests. Will this count against me?**

Most academic institutions require the TOEFL results for admission. Standardized tests help demonstrate your ability to study, but are only one of the things an interviewing officer considers. You will not be refused the visa solely on the basis that you have not taken one of the tests.

## **28. ■ Is the IELTS as recognized as the TOEFL?**

All standardized tests are considered when the interviewing officer assesses whether or not an applicant possesses the ability to be a successful student.

## **29. ■ Can I call the U.S. Embassy if I have a question specific to my case?**

We hope that the answers in this FAQ will help answer your questions. Specific questions about your case are best asked at the time of your interview. Please refer to the Embassy's website at [http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/visa\\_services.html](http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/visa_services.html) for further information. If your question is not answered by our website, you may send us an inquiry at [support-srilanka@ustraveldocs.com](mailto:support-srilanka@ustraveldocs.com).